

The world grieves with our NASA family

Milt Heflin’s words were as sincere as they were understated when describing the mood in Johnson Space Center’s Mission Control Center after contact was lost with the STS-107 crew aboard Space Shuttle *Columbia*.

"We began to know we had a bad day," the Chief of the Flight Director Office said to a global audience during a press conference in the Teague Auditorium just a few hours after the tragedy on Feb. 1, 2003.

Milt said it was a great day for a landing at Kennedy Space Center. At 9 a.m. EST, crowds were gathered to welcome home the crew after a successful 16-day science mission. The shuttle was to touch down on Runway 33 at 9:16 a.m.

I believe that their names will remain as the bright sparkling stars in the universe and will light the way for those who will follow them on the difficult roads of space exploration."

VALENTINA TERESHKOVA
First woman in space

Support has arrived from near and far. Love, sympathy and encouragement have been shown in many ways – from letters written by dignitaries to members of the general public placing bouquets of flowers at our main gate.

Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space, took a moment to write from Moscow: "I am deeply grieved by the loss of the crew of *Columbia*. I express my sincere condolences to the families and friends of the astronauts. I believe that their names will remain as the bright sparkling stars in the universe and will light the way for those who will follow them on the difficult roads of space exploration."

Since the tragedy, Johnson Space Center has received hundreds of e-mails, all of them sending their condolences to the families of the STS-107 crew.

A woman, who simply identified herself as Jana, wrote: "I just wanted to let you know that you and all of those at NASA are in our thoughts and prayers at this time. I cannot begin to imagine the heartache you are feeling right now! I am sure you will be very busy over the next few days and weeks. Just remember that you are loved!"

Another writer, Beverly McCartt, said: "My family and I wanted to let the folks at NASA know that they are in our thoughts and prayers. Your work is tremendously important to the future of humankind, and it is an enormous and dangerous undertaking – as exploration into the unknown has always been since humans first sought the answer to 'Why?'"

She went on to write: "Take the time to heal your hearts and souls, knowing that you are valued and cherished for taking us to places beyond our dreams. We mourn with you and offer whatever solace we can as you gather together to comfort one another and share your grief with those who truly understand. Take the time to remember – and heal. The heavens await – and you will lead us there. Thank you."

However, 9:16 came and went. Soon the happy gathering turned somber, and the crew’s families were taken away. What they soon learned was that MCC had lost communication and tracking with *Columbia* at 9 a.m. and never regained it.

As the world learned of these events, many were shaken and confused. A few hours later, President George W. Bush confirmed the worst.

"The *Columbia* is lost; there are no survivors," he said.

Since that time, the team at JSC, along with our entire NASA family, has worked diligently to find answers while enduring the excruciating pain of our personal loss.

Center Director Message



Remember and move forward

It's raining. The Texas sky is weeping over our terrible loss. First there was shock and denial. Then there was grief and mourning. Now there is frustration and anger.

I've been reading some of the latest headlines: "Stop the Shuttle," "Shuttle Too Old," "Too Expensive," "Too Dangerous," etc. The critics are out in force, taking advantage of our Nation's tragedy. Reading this stuff can give one a sense of hopelessness.

So what do we do about it? Do we say it's too hard and give up? Or do we rededicate ourselves to our purpose and fight the good fight? IT'S DECISION TIME FOR ALL OF US!

Here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to GUT IT OUT. I'm going to give it my best shot. Every day I'm going to dedicate my efforts to the memory of STS-107 and its valiant crew. Every day I'm going to give my very best to further this noble endeavor for which they gave their lives.

I am convinced that we are participating in one of the greatest achievements in the history of humankind. I am compelled to continue no matter how difficult the journey. I will not be denied!

Will you join me?

Beak sends.

FROM THE DESK OF LT. GEN. JEFFERSON D. HOWELL, JR.

This edition of the Roundup...

Like every member of our JSC family, the *Roundup* staff was devastated by the tragic events of STS-107. To honor the memory of our fallen family members, we have dedicated this entire edition to the STS-107 crew – Rick, Dave, Laurel, KC, Mike, Willie and Ilan.

It is our hope that, in this issue, we have captured their exuberance and excitement about their mission, as well as their personalities and humanity.

We also pay tribute to another beloved member of our NASA family – the Space Shuttle *Columbia*. She was our first shuttle and the symbol of our ingenuity. *Columbia* will forever remain special in our hearts.

Finally, this issue’s cover photo features a stunning image taken by the STS-107 crew just days before the accident. That photograph now symbolizes to us the sacrifice those seven heroes made in order for us to continue our journey in exploring the mysteries and wonders those heavens hold for all humankind.

Thank you STS-107 crew – you will never be forgotten.